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BICA plans to be a positive, political partner in Bedford

The Bedford Industrial and Commercial Association (BICA) may be a newcomer on the business organization block, but it plans to have a political and positive voice in the township.

BICA President Chuck Faller explained that the group was brought together after the passage of several new zoning ordinances last fall.

"We were born out of the need for businesses in the township to have a political voice," said Faller, during the group's monthly meeting. "We came together as a direct result of the building ordinances which are tough on businesses."

The ordinances that BICA takes issue with were passed on August 20, 2002, by the Bedford Township Board. The set of three ordinances guide outdoor lighting, landscaping and architecture as well as limiting the size of commercial business buildings.

The architectural ordinance amendment, the most hotly contested issue, puts limits on what a building will look like as well as how large it can be. It also made some C-1 zoned businesses currently in Bedford legal nonconforming.

The square footage limit for C-1 businesses is now 15,000 square feet. PBO businesses are

limited to between 7,500 to 8,000 square feet, C-2 can go to 70,000 square feet.

BICA's concerns with the new ordinances, said Faller, include driving out existing business while also driving away potential new business, creating disincentives to business expansion, the costs of increased law enforcement, fire protection, and lawsuits.

"BICA wants to protect existing businesses. There should not be a penalty for wanting to improve and grow your business," he said. "If the ordinances are a detriment to new

(Continued on page 8)

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(Continued from page 1)

businesses, we will be able to tell in time. We will be able to clearly tell by the number of new business starts we have. We are definitely pro bringing new business to Bedford."

BICA appeared before the township board on Sept. 17, two weeks after the passage of the ordinances, and again on Sept. 30, requesting board members put the new ordinances on hold until businesses had a chance to look at and request changes.

Although the board refused to hold the ordinances, they did agree to meet with members of BICA in order to hammer out a workable arrangement.

A representative group from BICA, including Faller; Phil Swy, of MTS Seating; Walt Wilburn, Walt's Heating and Air Conditioning Service; Bill Decker, Sr., Decker Homes, and Fred Berning, township resident and engineer, met with Bedford Township Supervisor LaMar Frederick, Dennis Jenkins, Bedford Township planning coordinator, Bedford Township Trustee Joyce Hagen, and Arvin Shah, a member of the Bedford Township Planning Committee.

"We are working towards lessening the severity of those ordinances with the township," said Faller. "I believe that they listened to our concerns and that they want to work with us."

Swy agreed with Faller adding, "Our driving priority is to protect the existing businesses in Bedford Township. The vast majority of businesses in Bedford are owned by Bedford residents. We care about what happens in our township."

Walt Wilburn also agreed saying, "People need to realize that we are Bedford residents first, business owners second."

Steve Lennex, of Lennex Realty, expressed his concern and outrage over the new ordinances.

"This is just a disgrace. Right now the residents in this township pay for everything," said Lennex. "With better economic development, the pressure can be taken off the residents because we will have a larger business tax base."

According to Faller, one reason BICA came out in force was that the ordinances themselves were not detailed and, in some instances, have led to misinformation amongst businesses and BICA members.

"One example of this is that businesses in downtown Temperance and Lambertville cannot comply with some of the

ordinances," said Faller. "What we have been told by officials is that the township is working on creating a Village Center in those areas. All of the businesses in the Village Center would be exempt from the ordinances. That was very comforting to hear. BICA is not opposed to new businesses coming in and building beautiful, well landscaped buildings. Our position is that the improvements required by the ordinances have got to be within the owner's means."

BICA has also stated that the architectural ordinance infringes on property rights, which brought some heat from residents during the September meetings. Some residents expressed concern over an impending Wal Mart or similar "big box" store moving to the township, an issue that BICA would like to remain neutral on.

"As far as Wal Mart or another big store goes, BICA does not have a position on them," Faller stressed. "Our position is that ordinances should not infringe on property owner's rights. To put a limit on building size regardless of land mass is ludicrous. How do you tell the owner of a property that he has paid taxes on for years who he can sell it to. If a buyer was to look at a large parcel of property and wanted to build a 90,000 square foot building, there would be a problem. What the ordinance has done is make the property worthless because it lessens the opportunity of the seller to sell to whomever he or she wants."

Not wishing to link BICA with any pro or con "big box" debate, Faller did say that a big store may already have some legal tools with which to come into Bedford.

"They could apply for a PUD which the board would have to vote on," said Faller. "There may also be a problem with the ex post de facto zoning which has occurred with the ordinance. We are not advocating that a big store come in. We are advocating the protection of our current busi-

nesses, and the healthy growth of new business, period."

Healthy and steady business growth, which keeps pace with residential development, is what the community needs, said Faller, adding that current residential growth is outpacing new business.

"There are some people who have moved here in the last 15 or so years who would like to keep the growth down," he said. "I am not blaming anyone for the growth. Frankly, the only thing they are guilty of is having good taste. I can remember what Bedford was like in the 1970s. It was a nice community back then but those times have changed. Believe me, I liked the rural feel Bedford had but I have never felt that I had the right to tell someone to stay out."

"Right now, the residential growth eclipses business growth," Faller continued. "It is the current growth that fuels the need for more products and services which are convenient for members of this community. With new business growth, it will lessen the tax burden on our residents individually. It would also mean more community partners for our schools and nonprofit organizations."

BICA currently has 35 plus members and is growing daily, said Faller. The current BICA membership roster reads like a copy of "Who's Who in the Bedford Business Community." Members are hoping to work with all of the Bedford businesses and to build their political clout.

"We would like to be a positive political partner and to give business a political voice," said Faller. "We believe businesses need someone on the board who will come to us and say, 'hey, you may want to look at this.' We want someone on the board to step-up for the businesses in this community."

For information on becoming a BICA member, contact Chuck Faller, (734) 847-8339, Eddie Talley, (734) 847-3831, or Gene Stock, (734) 847-6358.